

Shevardnadze Comments

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WINDHOEK, Namibia, March 20 — Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze of the Soviet Union told Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d today that Moscow had no desire to use force to deal with the Lithuanian drive for independence, or any intention of doing so, but the Soviet official was careful not to categorically rule out a military option.

Mr. Baker and Mr. Shevardnadze who were in Windhoek for the celebration of Namibia's independence, met for three and a half hours, then gave an impromptu news conference.

The Soviet official repeatedly emphasized Moscow's intention and desire not to use force in the dispute over the Lithuania's declaration of independence, which is being resisted by the Kremlin. Mr. Baker, for his part, constantly repeated Mr. Shevardnadze's own words, apparently trying to reduce any room for maneuver in Mr. Shevardnadze's remarks by putting the best gloss on them and by giving him a public record to live up to.

On his way to the meeting, Mr. Shevardnadze was asked whether he was worried about Lithuania's drive for independence. He answered: "I am worried. If I said I am not you would not believe me."

Asked if the Kremlin would use force, he said: "We are against the use of force in any region and particularly against using force domestically. The Secretary of State knows that quite well."

After the meeting, Mr. Baker said: "We discussed developments within the Soviet Union. The Minister made it very clear to me that they are hopeful that questions involving Lithuania will be handled through dialogue. That is what the central Government would like to have happen. That is what they expect to have happen. He once again, as he has done before, said that force was not the solution to the problem as far as the Soviet Union is concerned."

Asked if he left the meeting feeling reassured that the Soviets would not use force, Mr. Baker said: "I thought that he was fairly definitive when he said that force would not be the solution as far as the Soviet Union is concerned. We want to solve the problem through dialogue. He said that several times. There is no reason we know of not to take him at his word."

The two also discussed other topics, including a date for the June summit between President Mikhail S. Gorbachev and President Bush — which is expected to be announced shortly — as well as Afghanistan, German unification and arms control.

On the German question, Mr. Shevardnadze was careful, once again, not to rule out NATO membership for a united Germany, provided there were security guarantees for the Soviets.